Programming documents of the Belgian Objectives 1 and 2 areas for the period 1994-1999

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In adopting the report by Mr Francis DECOURRIERE (PPE, F) on development problems and structural measures in Belgium, the European Parliament notes there is no guarantee that Community structural policy will enable Hainaut (an Objective 1 region) or Belgium's Objective 2 and 5b regions to move significantly closer to the Community average per capita GDP by 1999, particularly as the effective rate of utilization of Community appropriations is very low, the one exception being the case of Objective 3. The rate of commitment of Community appropriations as at 1 January 1999 should serve as a reference basis for calculating the amounts allocated after 1999. The report therefore calls on the public authorities to provide the counterpart funding which is essential to the implementation of certain projects, to render administrative procedures less cumbersome, and to improve management and independent evaluation of single programming documents (SPDs). The report also calls for projects to be concentrated on certain geographical areas and themes. At geographical level, the aim is to target the poorest subregions, though it is important, in the very small Objective 5b regions (Westhoek, coastal municipalities), to prevent a split into eligible and non-eligible areas. Finally, the Commission must penalize the relocation of companies from ineligible to assisted regions. If structural policy is to be effective, thematic or sectoral targeting not geared to a specific region is essential. Generally speaking, the report advocates a more active endogenous development strategy, the priorities of which should be economic diversification, research promotion, dissemination of new technologies, vocational training and job creation. The granting of assistance to companies should be made more dependent on the creation of lasting jobs, and more attention and resources should be devoted to projects conducive to the creation of skilled jobs in sectors open to new technologies. Employment in rural areas should also be promoted by setting up decentralized local development agencies. The regional authorities, the two sides of industry, local government and private integration agencies must be involved in negotiating, implementing and monitoring programmes. The report also advocates increased participation by women in integration programmes, the development of SMEs and the services sector. As regards evaluation of EU structural policy, the report calls on the Commission to establish objective and measurable procedures and indicators. Finally, it urges the Commission and the Council to ensure that the preparatory activities for the forthcoming programming period are completed in good time, so that the SPDs are finalized for the start of that period.